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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: URIBE SLAMS FARC "INTELLECTUAL BLOCK" AFTER
CHAOTIC ROUND OF HOSTAGE RELEASES

REF: BOGOTA 319

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

11. (S) The FARC freed six "political" hostages the week of February 1 to the ICRC and members of the "Colombians for Peace" group led by Senator Piedad Cordoba. After the releases, Uribe slammed the FARC's "intellectual block"--a reference to Cordoba's group--for trying to "trick" Colombia and weaken the GOC's democratic security policy. "Colombians for Peace"--citing the releases and a FARC communique supporting humanitarian accord talks--reiterated its commitment to promote such a deal despite Uribe's criticism. GOC-authorized messenger to the FARC Henry Acosta was skeptical about prospects for progress on FARC talks with the Uribe Administration, noting FARC leaders' fears that the GOC would exploit any communications to locate and kill them, as well as internal resistance from FARC hard-liners. End Summary.

TWO HOSTAGES RELEASED

12. (U) The FARC released former-Meta Governor Alan Jara on February 4 and former-Valle de Cauca department assemblyman Sigifredo Lopez on February 5 to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and members of "Colombians for Peace" group led by Senator Piedad Cordoba. Four members of the Colombian security forces were released on February 1 (reftel). Brazil provided logistical support for the recovery operation. Lopez, who was kidnapped in 2002 along with eleven other Valle assemblymen, told the media that the FARC executed his eleven colleagues in May 2007 during a "friendly fire" incident. Twenty-one political hostages, all members of the police and military, remain in FARC custody.

13. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo offered his resignation after the Jara release over a disagreement with Uribe over media access to the hostages. Uribe rejected the resignation on February 6 and praised Restrepo for his years of effort. Restrepo told us in December that he had tried to resign on several occasions over the past year, but Uribe never accepted the resignations. Minister for Social Protection Diego Palacio Betancourt called us on February 5, asking for information on USG procedures for managing hostage releases. We provided a briefing from Embassy hostage

recovery experts to Palacio and his lead psychiatrist Dr. Jose Posada on how to design a structured process to improve the post-captivity experience for victims.

URIBE SLAMS FARC FOR DUPLICITY

¶4. (U) President Uribe used his February 7 town hall meeting in Meta Department to slam the FARC for trying to "trick" the country through the hostage release. He said the GOC would not permit the "intellectual block" of the FARC to disorient Colombia "with a peace discourse that ends up strengthening terrorism." Uribe added that, while the FARC "talked peace, it also produced blood" through continued attacks against civilians. He concluded, "we have to take the battle to them in the entire country."

¶5. (C) Presidential Advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us Uribe dismissed the FARC hostage releases as nothing more than a FARC campaign to strengthen the Colombian "peace camp" and make Senator Piedad Cordoba its leader. He said the releases have given Cordoba such a boost that she could win a Liberal Party presidential primary and get a million votes in a general election--which would continue the Liberals slow decline into irrelevance. (Uribe won 7.4 million votes in 2006, and second place finisher from the Polo, Carlos Gaviria, received 2.6 million.)

NO "HUMANITARIAN EXCHANGE"

¶6. (C) Gaviria rejected the notion of a "humanitarian exchange" with the FARC. He said that for any such exchange, both sides would need to hold prisoners. The FARC

members held by the GOC are not prisoners, but criminals convicted in a judicial process. He said that FARC only wants a humanitarian exchange to get the GOC to recognize it as a "belligerent" force--something the GOC will not do. Any peace process with the FARC (or ELN) would have to be along the lines of the paramilitary process--terms which remain unacceptable to the FARC's leadership.

GOC GOING AFTER FARC LEADERSHIP

¶7. (C) Gaviria said the GOC might be able to negotiate with the more pragmatic FARC Secretariat member Pablo Catatumbo, but only after killing or capturing more radical FARC leaders such as Cano and Mono Jojoy. He said the GOC would consider operations to go after FARC leaders Ivan Marquez and Timochenko in Venezuela--operations that Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo told us would likely be difficult.

COLOMBIAN FOR PEACE CONTINUE EFFORTS

8 (U) The FARC issued a communique on February 4 thanking Brazil for its assistance, praising Cordoba, and again raising the possibility of a humanitarian accord. The group said it hoped its unilateral release would lead to an accord with the GOC. The group added that they had not forgotten Simon and Sonia (FARC members "Simon Trinidad" and "Sonia," convicted in the United States of narcotics and terrorism charges). Cordoba and the Colombians for Peace Group embraced the communique, said they would ignore Uribe's "intellectual block" comments, and vowed to continue to work to bridge the gap between the FARC and GOC.

FARC HARD-LINERS BLOCK PRAGMATISTS

¶9. (S) The GOC-authorized messenger to the FARC Henry Acosta was skeptical about prospects for GOC-FARC talks on either a humanitarian accord or a broader peace process during the remainder of the Uribe administration. He said that after the successful GOC attack on Secretariat member Raul Reyes' camp last March, FARC leaders fear the GOC will exploit any communications to locate and kill them. Moreover, Acosta added that while Cano and Catatumbo voiced interest in seeking a political solution to the conflict in the past, it is not clear that such an approach would receive the support of FARC hard-liners such as Mono Jojoy.

